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ABSTRACT

Mark Twain was a strong proponent of the superiority of the spoken word. Realizing the importance of conversational style, Twain derived from and acted in accordance with the principles of communication effectiveness which subsequently formed theoretical bases for communication instruction by such scholars as James Winans and Charles Woolbert. An avid interest in human behavior led Twain to perceive oral reading as an interactive relationship among source, speaker, and listener, and he maintained that the listener was the most important consideration. A reading by Charles Dickens introduced him to the profession of platform performing, and he learned the art through observation and practice, studying the techniques of contemporaries, Artemus Ward, Henry Ward Beecher, and the Reverend Dr. Chapin. Twain became a member of the Boston Lyceum Bureau and soon became convinced that the art of reading required greater skill than the art of lecturing. The material he found most entertaining to his audiences included stories, anecdotes, dramatic scenes, and descriptions from a wide variety of his writings. Twain recited his material in careless dress and constant deadpan expression, often appearing to be unprepared or confused; he would mark transitions by moving from one side of the stage to the other. He considered the dramatic pause a "powerful gun" and practiced it to perfection. Before the emergence of contemporary communication theory, with its emphasis on defining effectiveness as creating an intended response, Twain was practicing this theory with his innovative style. (Original and platform transcripts of one of Twain's most popular readings and 18 references are included.) (AEW)

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MARK TWAIN—PROPONENT OF ORAL EXPRESSION

HIS THEORIES AND METHODS
ON ORAL READING

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ABSTRACT

For more than forty years the renowned American author Mark Twain gained fame and fortune, nationally and internationally, as a platform performer. It was this experience which stimulated and promoted his artistic development. From his platform performances Twain became acutely aware of the audience as the most important demand in communication. He learned to adjust his written compositions to "flexible talk," strongly acknowledging the superiority of oral expression. Mark Twain's theories on the oral reading of literature established him as one of the early pioneers of contemporary communication theory.

For more than forty years the renowned American author Mark Twain gained fame and fortune, nationally and internationally, as a platform performer. This experience transformed him from a regional journalist-lecturer whose appeal to audiences lay in the recreating of the character of the American West of the 1860's to that of a cultivated personality who appealed to many levels of society, including the most cultured, at home and abroad. This "alternate career," as he called his reading performances, made him one of the most public figures of his time. Like Dickens, his initial prototype for these performances, he at times proclaimed to loathe them, claiming to turn to the platform only because of financial necessity. However, in truth, Twain's art benefited from these experiences. The platform was an essential part of his total development as a celebrated personality and a consummate communicator.

In spite of the conclusion that it was Twain's platform career that contributed much to the development of his great talent (Ferguson, 1966, p. 113; Lorch, 1966; p. x, Wagenknecht, 1935, pp. 56-57), relatively very little has been written about this profound influence. The few books, journal articles, and theses available tend to chronicle these performances; however, none seems to analyze them as contributions to the field of communication. Most information about Twain's thoughts on oral presentations are his own, found in Bernard DeVoto's collection Mark Twain in Eruption: Hitherto Unpublished Pages about Men and Events by Mark Twain.

The purpose of this essay is to establish that the renowned American writer Mark Twain, born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, was a strong proponent of

the superiority of the spoken word. "Lord, there's nothing like a human organ to make words live and throb, and lift the bearer to the full altitudes of their meaning," he once exclaimed. (Paine, 1923, p. 502). He was well aware of the differences between the processes of writing and speaking, in noting that "print is the proper vehicle for written speech, but the moment 'talk' is put into print you recognize that it is not what it was when you read it; you perceive that an immense something has disappeared from it. That's its soul" (Cited by Paine, 1923, p. 504). "Written things are not for speech," he reasoned, "their form is literary; they are stiff, inflexible, and will not lend themselves to happy and effective delivery with the tongue ...they have to be limbered up, broken up, colloquialized, and turned into common forms of unpremeditated talk --otherwise they will bore the house, not entertain it" (Cited by DeVoto, 1940, p. 217).

In an age in which elocution was acknowledged as the proper form of speech training for the platform, Mark Twain was a man ahead of his time. From observation and practice he derived and acted in accordance with the principles of communication effectiveness which subsequently formed theoretical bases for communication instruction by such scholars as James Winans and Charles Woolbert. Like Winans, he realized the importance of conversational style, of the sense of recreating the thought at the moment of utterance for greatest impact on an audience (Winans, 1926, pp. 20-48). He viewed the speech process a single unified act as articulated in Woolbert's notion that:

A man speaking is four things, all of them needed in revealing his mind to others. First, he is a will, an intent, a meaning which he wishes others to have, a thought. Second, he is a user of language, molding thought and feeling into words. Third, he is a thing to be heard, carrying his purpose and words to others through voice. Last he is a thing to be seen, shown to the sight, a being of action to be noted and read through the eyes (Woolbert, 1920, p. 3).

Long before such scholarly pronouncements, Twain, with no formal training, saw platform presentations as communicative acts. Like Woolbert (1920), he believed that creating an intended response in the individual audience is the major mission of the platform performer. His avid interest in human behavior led him to perceive oral reading as an interactive relationship among source, speaker, and listener, with the listener as the most important consideration. Therefore, his choice of material, his preparation, and his delivery techniques all had one objective: to elicit a planned, carefully contrived response from his audience. It is interesting to note here that books regarding oral interpretation as an expressive form of communication did not appear until 1975. Some of these describing the process of interpretation according to behavioristic communication models include The Communicative Act of Oral Interpretation (Brooks, Bahn, and Okey, 1975), Communicative Performance of Literature (Gilbert, 1977), and Communicate Through Oral Reading (Ecroyd and Wagner, 1979).

This essay will discuss Twain's theories of oral reading, the bases for such formulations, and their translation into performance. His adaptation of the popular selection from his novel Roughing It, "His Grandfather's Old Ram," from the written version to the version revised for platform presentation will be included to illustrate his conviction that oral expression as a form of communication is superior to written expression.

Mark Twain was introduced to the profession of platform performing when he observed a reading by Charles Dickens. He noted that Dickens not only read but also acted: "His reading of the storm scene in which Steerforth lost his life was so vivid, and so full of energetic action that his house was carried off its feet, so to speak" (Cited by DeVoto, 1940, pp.214). Thus, he began to learn the art through observation and practice. He made a conscious effort

to study the techniques of such successful contemporaries as Artemus Ward, Henry Ward Beecher, and the Reverend Dr. Chapin. As a member of the Boston Lyceum Bureau, in association with James Redpath, he was required to meet in Boston each October at the onset of the tour for an informal workshop on oral reading. Members would analyze and evaluate their previous performances, underscoring those techniques which they concluded were responsible for their successes and failures (Lorch, 1966, p. 105). Twain learned much in preparation for his "alternate career" during these sessions. He concluded that the only way to develop this craft was through intensive observation and practice, not through the prescribed training advocated by the elocutionists.

In short time this performer who ascended to the platform as a lecturer became convinced that the art of reading required greater skill than the art of lecturing. People listening to an informative lecture tended to be satisfied with the substance. The reader, on the other hand, has to capture and please his audience depending almost entirely upon skill--upon manners, techniques and devices which he discovered to be effective to his purpose. Therefore, he concluded, "Manner is everything." (Clemens, 1940, p.). This conclusion that the secret to communication success lay in the presenter's delivery was a truth which played a decisive role in shaping his own performance.

Twain immersed himself in his study of oral language. He was gifted with a "phonographic memory"; he could hear dialects and recreate them later both orally and in writing (Lorch, 1966, p. 16). Reading literature aloud was not only an occupation for him, it was also a delightful means of recreation. "One cannot get out of finely wrought literature all that is in it by reading mutely" (Cited by Gribben, 1976, p. 53). In addition to his public performances where his purpose was chiefly to entertain, not as a buffoon,

however, but as an astute humorist, this genius in the art of communicating delighted in giving private readings of more serious works. His renderings of the poems of Robert Browning, along with selections from The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, Rudyard Kipling, Charles Dickens, and others, were widely acclaimed. When writing a book he frequently read aloud from the manuscript before his family and friends. "Where his writing was crude or stiff, the test of oral utterance exposed the weakness and taught him how to mend it" (Lennon, 1953, p. 197). Of course, the public platform was also used for this purpose, for such works as The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

Selection of Material for Public Readings

The material Twain found most entertaining to his public audiences included stories, anecdotes, dramatic scenes, and descriptions from wide variety of his writings: The Prince and the Pauper, Joan of Arc, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Roughing It, Innocents Abroad, Puddin' Head Wilson, and from his minor and autobiographical writings. "The persona of the poem or story seemed generally to have been crucial in his selections" (Gribben, 1976, p. 52). He became the embodiment of these characterizations within his own works, for he believed that the actor contributed more than half of the meaning of a creation: "What we have strongly conceived we ought to make others strongly imagine, and we ought to use every genuine art to that end" (Cited by Howells, 1910, p. 520).

Preparation of Material

Considering preparation as "my duty to my audience," (Paine, 1923, p. 449), Twain devoted many hours to this phase of oral reading. He openly

acknowledged that the audience was a large part of his success. Recognizing the importance of that special relationship he disclosed, "I know a great many secrets about audiences--secrets not to be gotten out of books, but acquired only by experience" (Paine, II, 542).

At the outset he would prepare his material by carefully memorizing passages with a unique system of mnemonics. However, since he believed that every audience was different and that the effectiveness of the reading was determined by the auditors' responses, Twain adjusted his material accordingly. Therefore, the cuttings available to us and even the programs are not an accurate guide to what he said on the platform. To Twain, "change and adaptation was the highest form of the art of reading" (Donner, 1947, p. 309). In other words, Twain's readings were extemporized versions of his original works. He referred to these alterations in the material as creating "the captivating naturalness of an impromptu narration" (Cited by DeVoto, 1940, p. 224). In response to an inquiry on the differences between the written and platform versions of "His Grandfather's Old Ram," Twain simply responded that "It wouldn't read, -- that is, it wouldn't read aloud" (Cited by DeVoto, 1940, p. 217).

Twain also advocated much rehearsal so that the speaker's delivery is "limbered up so that it will seem impromptu to an audience" (Cited by Paine, 1912, p. 294). Creating the sense of spontaneity required such planning. Observed George Cable, with whom Twain shared the platform during their lecture tour of 1884-85 "It was the rigor of his art, an art which was able to carry the added burden beyond the burden of other men's art, the burden of absolutely concealing itself, of making him appear as slipshod in his mind as he was in his gait" (Cable, 1960, p. 77).

He also prepared for delivery without using a book. He discovered that reading from such "renders the nicest shadings of delivery impossible. I mean those studied fictions which seem to be the impulse of the moment and which are so effective: such as, for instance, fictitious hesitations for the right word, fictitious unconscious pauses, fictitious unconscious side remarks, fictitious unconscious embarrassments, fictitious unconscious emphases placed upon the wrong word with a deep intention back of it" (Cited by DeVoto, 1940, p. 224). These additions promote that "naturalness of an impromptu narration" that Twain professed to be the kind of presentation most captivating to an audience. Acknowledging that book readers can attempt to create the same effect, he warns that it would be perceived as "artifice, and although the audience may admire their cleverness and their ingenuity at artifice, they only get at the intellect of the house, they don't get at its heart; and so the reader's success lacks a good deal of being complete" (Cited by DeVoto, 1940, pp. 224-225). With a book, he admonishes, "the reader is telling another person's tale at secondhand; you are a mimic and not the person involved; you are artificiality, not a reality" (DeVoto, 1940, p. 224).

According to Twain, reading from a book also deprives the reader of the "one powerful gun in his battery of artifice that he can't work with an effect proportionate to its caliber" (Cited by DeVoto, 1949, p. 225)--the pause. This "impressive silence, that eloquent silence, that geometrically progressive silence which often achieves a desired effect where no combination of words howsoever felicitous could accomplish it" (Cited by DeVoto, 1949, p. 225) is no use to a book reader because one cannot readily read the feedback from the listeners to determine its length. Therefore, this most effective device of delivery cannot be used for the greatest impact.

Twain dreaded formal introductions and soon dispensed with them. On the reading tour with Cable they often introduced one another. When he appeared alone, he made his entrance as if there was no preparation. In line with his conviction that a sense of spontaneity is the secret to platform success, he would often shuffle onto the stage as if unaware that an audience was present and then show confusion and alarm at being discovered in such a situation. Other times he planned his introduction so that the curtain would open, and he would be playing the piano--again appearing totally unprepared for the occasion.

This device of appearing unprepared was also worked into his exits. He would often seem confused when leaving the stage, thereby creating a great deal of fun when he failed to use the correct door. This comical business, commonly referred to as "schtick" by contemporary comedians, was meticulously contrived and rehearsed for the sole purpose of establishing and maintaining the mood of his reading program from beginning to end.

Style of Delivery

Mark Twain's singular intention to create a total effect on the audience was reinforced by his delivery. Strong in the belief that spontaneity and surprise in humorous presentations, in particular, are most captivating to the audience, he recited his material in careless dress with a constant deadpan expression while often denoting transitions in his material by moving from one side of the stage to the other. His speech rate was characteristically slow and drawling, yet always conversational. And adequately armed with the "powerful gun," the pause, which he practiced to perfection, he brought great suspense to his delivery: "He knew how to make one second of silence outweigh a hundred words" (Ade, 1936, p. 10).

Perhaps the best description of his physical appearance as well as his delivery style comes from this article appearing in a late nineteenth century issue of The Critic magazine:

[F]or the most part, he talks in low, slow, conversational tones, at times he rises to real bursts of eloquence--not the polished, grandiloquent eloquence of the average American speaker, but the eloquence conveyed in simple words and phrases, and prompted by some deep and sincerely felt sentiment.

Mark Twain steals unobtrusively on to the platform, dressed in the regulation evening-clothes, with the trouser-pockets cut high up, into which he occasionally drives both hands. He bows with a quiet dignity to the roaring cheers which greet him at every "At Home." Then, with natural, unaffected gesture, and with scarcely any prelude, he gets under way with his first story. He is a picturesque figure on the stage. His long, shaggy, white hair surmounts a face full of intellectual fire. The eyes, arched with bushy brows, and which seem to be closed most of the time while he is speaking, flash out now and then from their deep sockets with a genial, kindly, pathetic look, and the face is deeply drawn with the furrows accumulated during an existence of sixty years. He talks in short sentences, with a peculiar smack of the lips at the end of each. His language is just that of his books, full of the quaintest Americanisms. ...His figure is rather slight, not above middle height, and the whole man suggests an utter lack of physical energy... Mark Twain stands perfectly still in one place during the whole of the time he is talking to the audience. He rarely moves his arms, unless it is to adjust his spectacles or to show by action how a certain thing was done. His characteristic attitude is to stand quite still, with the right arm across the abdomen and the left resting on it and supporting his chin. In this way he talks on for nearly two hours; and, while the audience is laughing uproariously, he never by any chance relapses into a smile.

To have read Mark Twain is a delight. But to have seen and heard him is a joy not readily to be forgotten. ("Mark Twain on the Platform," 1896, p. 286)

Indeed, Mark Twain, one of America's most celebrated authors, is also a sparkling star in the firmament of oral communication. Before the emergence of contemporary communication theory with its emphasis on defining effectiveness as creating an intended response in the other, Twain was innovatively practicing this theory. In a world where elocution training was the de rigeur for platform performers, Mark Twain won the respect of the most cultured members of world society with his unique natural style. This exceedingly uncommon "common man" championed humankind as homo loquens, the talking animal. According to those who knew him well:

"He knew all the stops in that simple instrument man, and there is no doubt that these results were accurately intended from this unerring knowledge" (Howells, 1910, pp. 99-100). He was a most consummate actor, with this difference from other actors, that he was the first to know the thoughts and invent the fancies to which his voice and action gave the color of life. Representation is the art of other actors; his art was creative as well as representative; it was nothing at second hand" (Henderson, 1910, p. vii).

The need to recognize the contributions of this great man of letters to contemporary communication theory and, specifically, to oral interpretation is long overdue. In 1969, an article published in the Western Journal of Speech Communication entitled "Experimental Studies in Oral Interpretation: The Audience" reported that: "The audience, composed of a group of listeners, is the one element in the process of oral interpretation that has received the least attention of scholarly writings in the field" (Reynolds, 1969, p. 241). A century earlier Mark Twain anticipated this view.

"HIS GRANDFATHER'S OLD RAM": AN ILLUSTRATION OF TWAIN'S
THEORY OF ORAL READING

One of the most popular readings offered by Twain was the story "His Grandfather's Old Ram" from his novel Roughing It. The chief persona of the story is Jim Blaine, renowned among the miners for telling the tale of his grandfather's old ram only when he was "comfortably and sociably drunk" (Twain, 1899, p. 120).

Twain explains his purpose:

The idea of the tale is to exhibit certain bad effects of a good memory: the sort of memory which is too good, which remembers everything and forgets nothing, which has no sense of proportion and can't tell an important event from an unimportant one but preserves them all, states them all, and thus retards the progress of a narrative, at the same time making a tangled, inextricable confusion of it and intolerably wearisome to the listener (DeVoto, 1940, pp. 217-218).

This reading is an excellent example of how Twain adapted his written material for the platform. "After I had memorized it, it began to undergo changes on the platform and it continued to edit and revise itself, night after night, until by and by, from dreading to begin on it before an audience I came to like it and enjoy it" (Cited by DeVoto, 1940, p. 217).

The following is an analysis of this adaptation, which will serve to illustrate Twain's theories on oral reading.

In his essay "How to Tell a Story," Twain explains the rationale for such revisions:

The humorous story is strictly a work of art--and only an artist can tell it, . . . may be spun out to great length and may wander around as it pleases, and arrive nowhere in particular, depends for its effect upon the manner of the telling, is told gravely; the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it. . . . Very often, of course, the rambling and disjointed humorous story finishes with a nub, point, snapper, or whatever you like the call it. Then the listener must be alert, for in many cases the teller will divert attention from that nub by dropping it in a carefully casual and indifferent way, with the pretence that he does not know it is a nub (Clemens, 1918, pp. 3-5).

[The pause] is an exceedingly important feature in any kind of story, and a frequently recurring feature, too. It is a dainty thing, and delicate, and also uncertain and treacherous; for it must be exactly the right length--no more and no less--or it fails of its purpose and makes trouble" (Clemens, 1918, p. 9).

In the platform version of "His Grandfather's Old Ram" the following changes are evident:

Jim Blaine, the narrator, is not nearly so bad a rambler as Jim of the original. In the original, his mind diverts from the subject at hand at least twenty-five times, in the revision, only eleven times.

In the revised version Twain's language appears to be more vivid. For example, in the incident in the carpet factory he changed the word "nipped" to "snatch," which tends to give the listener a clearer image of Wheeler being taken bodily into the machinery. He also uses more descriptive terms when he

expounds on the pedigree of the dog. In the original version the dog was undramatically defined as "a regular shepherd -- or rather he was part bull and part shepherd -- splendid animal." In the platform version the dog "wa'n't no common dog, he wa'n't no mongrel; he was a composite. A composite dog is a dog that's made up of all the valuable qualities that's in the dog breed -- kind of a syndicate; and a mongrel is made up of the riffraff that's left over."

In the platform version a clearer picture is given of Wheeler's demise and burial, with the addition of an epitaph to his grave. The length of carpet increased from fourteen to thirty-nine yards and the epitaph read "To the loving memory of thirty-nine yards best three-ply carpeting containing the mortal remainders of Millington G. Wheeler go thou and do likewise." This absurd situation is exaggerated for the purpose of intensifying the humorous effect.

In revising this story for telling, Twain worked on adapting his ideas to be more humorous and appealing. An example of this is the changes made to express the idea of the glass eye. The original version appears rather distressing, but the platform version is delightfully humorous. Again, the language was made more vivid to emphasize the humorous intent. Rather than the sad picture of this poor old woman trying to keep this ill-fitting false eye in her socket, as is the case in the original version, Twain changed the recipient of the glass eye to an apparently younger and larger woman who, although her eye also did not fit: [I]t was a number seven, she was escavated for a fourteen," it spun around colorfully in her socket whenever she winked.

The subject of the tale, the ram, is only mentioned in the original, leaving the listener to wonder what happened. But in the revised version Twain heightens the suspense of the tale by constantly referring to the ram in

his opening statements. He also presents a vivid picture of what the ram is about to do, thereby, maintaining audience interest.

The completion of the tale in both versions is quite different in content. In the revised version Twain refers to the mystery of the ten-cent piece; in the original rendition, he only mentions the grandfather's old ram. Again, the revisions made the conclusion more suspenseful and, therefore, more appealing to the audience.

The delivery device Twain depended on most for creating the intended effect of this reading was the pause. "When the pause was right, the effect was sure; when the pause was wrong in length, by the five-millionth of an inch, the laughter was only mild, never a crash" (DeVoto, 1940, p. 227). It's most effective use was at the part where the question under discussion is whether the falling of the Irishman on the stranger was an accident or an act of providence:

If it was a special providence, and if the sole purpose of it was to save the Irishman, why was it necessary to sacrifice the stranger? "The dog was there. Why didn't he fall on the dog? Why wa'n't the dog app'inted? Becuz the dog would 'a' seen him a-com'." . . . A pause after the remark was absolutely necessary with any and all audiences because no man, howsoever intelligent he may be, and instantly adjusted his mind to a new and unfamiliar, and yet for a moment or two apparently plausible, logic which recognizes in a dog an instrument too indifferent to pious restraints and too alert in looking out for his own personal interest to be safely depended upon in an emergency requiring self-sacrifice for the benefit of another, even when the command comes from of high (DeVoto, 1940, pp. 227-228).

The texts of both the original and platform versions follow. They serve as a clear illustration of Twain's basic theory on oral reading -- that "written things" have to be "turned into common forms of unpremeditated talk" in order to entertain the house (DeVoto, 1940, p. 217). Therefore, he freely changed his original works to achieve his overall objective of creating an intended response in the particular audience.

Original Version

I don't reckon them times will ever come again. There never was a more bullier old ram than what he was. Grandfather fetched him from Illinois--got him of a man by the name of Yates--Bill--Yates--maybe you might have heard of him; his father was deacon--Baptist--and he was a rustler, too, a man had to get up ruther early to get the start of old Yates; it was him that put the Greens up to jining teams with my grandfather when he moved.

(This is the last the reader ever hears of the ram and grandfather.)

Platform Version

"Well, as I was a-sayin', he bought that old ram from a feller up in Siskiyou County and fetched him home and turned him loose in the medder, and next morning he went down to have a look at him, and accident'ly dropped a ten-cent piece in the grass and stooped down--so--and was a-fumblin' around in the grass to git it, and the ram he was a-standin' up the slope taking notice, because he had his back to the ram and was int'rested about the dime. Well, there he was, as I was a-sayin' down at the foot of the slope a-bendin' over--so--fumblin' in the grass, and the ram he was up there at the top of the slope, and Smith--Smith was a-standin' there--no, not jest there, a little further away--fifteen foot perhaps--well, my grandfather was a-stoopin' way down--so--and the ram was up there observing, you know, and Smith he . . . (musing) . . . the ram he bent his head down, so . . . Smith of Calaveras . . . no, no it couldn't ben Smith of Calaveras--I remember now that he--b'George it was Smith of Tulare County --course it was, I remember it now perfectly plain.

"Well, Smith he stood just there, and my grandfather he stood just here, you know, and he was a-bendin' down just so, fumblin' in the grass, and when the old ram see him in that attitude he took it fur an invitation--and here he come! down the slope thirty mile an hour and his eye full of business. You see my grandfather's back being

to him, and him stooping down like that, of course he --why sho! it warn't Smith of Tulare at all, it was Smith of Sacramento--my goodness, how did I ever come to get them Smiths mixed like that --why, Smith of Tulare was jest a nobody, but Smith of Sacramento--why the Smiths of Sacramento come of the best Southern blood in the United States; there warn't ever any better blood south of the line than the Sacramento Smiths. Why look here, one of them married a Whitaker! I reckon that gives you an idea of the kind of society the Sacramento Smiths could 'sociate around in; there ain't no better blood than that Whitaker blood; I reckon anybody'll tell you that.

(In the revised version the story of the ram is developed and is carried to the point of great suspense. Twain succeeds in this version to arouse the interest of the audience where he had failed in the original.)

Seth Green was prob'ly the pick of the flock; he married a Wilkerson--Sarah Wilkerson --good cretur, she was--one of the likeliest heifers that was ever raised in old Stoddard, everybody said they knowed her. She could heft a bar't of flour easy as I can flirt a flapjack. And spin? Don't mention it! Independent? Humph! When Sile Hawkins come to browsing around her, she let him know that for all his tin he couldn't trot in harness alongside of her.

"Look at Mariar Whitaker --there was a girl for you! Little? Why yes, she was little, but what of that? Look at the heart of her--had a heart like a bullock --just as good and sweet and lovely and generous as the day is long; if she had a thing and you wanted it, you could have it--have it and welcome; why Mariar Whitaker couldn't have a thing and another person need it and not get it--get it and welcome. She had a glass eye

You see, Sile Hawkins was--no, it warn't Sile Hawkins, after all--it was a galoot by the name of Filkins--I disremember his first name; but he was a stump--come into pra'r meeting drunk, one night, horraying for Nixon, becuz he thought it was a primary; and old Deacon Ferguson up and scooted him through the window and he lit on old Miss Jefferson's head, poor old filly. She was a good soul--had a glass eye and used to lend it to old Miss Wagner, that hadn't any, to receive company in; it warn't big enough, and when Miss Wagner warn't noticing, it would get twisted around in the socket, and look up, maybe, or out to one side, and every which way, while t'other one was looking as straight ahead as a spy-glass. Grown people didn't mind it, but it most always made the children cry, it was so sort of scary. She tried packing it in raw cotton, but it wouldn't work, somehow--the cotton would get loose and stick out and look so kind of awful that the children couldn't stand it no way. She was always dropping it out, and turning up her old deadlight on the company empty, and making the oncom-fortable, becuz she never could tell when it hopped out, being blind on that side, you see. So somebody would have to hunch her and say 'Your game eye has fetched lose, Miss Wagner, dear'--and then all of them would have to sit and wait till she jammed it in again --wrong side before, as a general thing, and green as a bird's egg, being a bashful cretur and easy sot back before

and she used to lend it to Flora Ann Baxter that hand't any, to receive company with; well, she was pretty large, and it didn't fit; it was a number seven, and she was excavated for a fourteen, and so that eye wouldn't lay still; every time she winked it would turn over. It was a beautiful eye and set her off admirable, because it was a lovely pale blue on the front side--the side you looked out of--and it was gilded on the back side; didn't match the other eye, which was one of them browny-yellery eyes and tranquil and quiet, you know, the way that kind of eyes are; but that warn't any matter--they worked together alright and plenty picturesque. When Flora Ann winked, that blue and gilt eye would whirl over, and the other one stand still, and as soon as she begun to get excited that hand-made eye would give a whirl and then go on a-whirlin' and a-whirlin' faster and faster, and a-flashin' first blue and then yaller and then blue and then yaller, and when it got to whizzing and flashing like that, the oldest man in the world couldn't keep up with the expression on that side of her face. Flora Ann Baxter married a Hogadorn. I reckon that lets you understand what kind of blood she was--old Maryland Eastern Shore blood; not a better family in the United States than the Hogadorns.

(In the revised version, Twain changed the name of Sarah Wilkerson to Mariar

company. But being wrong side before warn't much difference, anyway, becuz her own eye was sky-blue and the glass one was yaller on the front side, so whichever way she turned it it didn't match nohow. Old Miss Wagner was considerable on the borrow, she was. When she had a quilting, or Dorcas S'iety at her house she gen'ally borrowed Miss Higgin's wooden leg to stump around on; it was considerable shorter than her other pin, but much she minded that. She said she couldn't abide crutches when she had company becuz--they were so slow; said when she had company and things had to be done, she wanted to get up and hump herself. She was as bald as a jug, and so she used to borrow Miss Jacop's wig-- Miss Jacops was the coffin-peddler's wife--a ratty old buzzard, he was, that used to go roosting around where people was sick, waiting for 'em; and there that old rip would sit all day, in the shade, on a coffin that he judged would fit the can'idate; and if it was a slow customer and kind of uncertain, he'd fetch his rations and blanket along and sleep in the coffin nights. He was anchored out that way, in frosty weather, for about three weeks, once, before old Robbins' place, waiting for him; and after that, for as much as two years, Jacops was not on speaking terms with the old man, on account of his disapp'inting him. He got one of his feet froze, and lost money, too, becuz old Robbins took a favorable turn and got well. The next time Robbins got sick, Jacops tried to make up with him, and varnished up the same

Whitaker. He also revised the selection to make it less distressing, leaving out the incident of the leg and wig.)

old coffin and fetched it along; but old Robbins was too many for him, he had him in, and 'peared to be powerful weak; he bought the coffin for ten dollars and Jacops was to pay it back and twenty-five more besides if Robbins died, and at the funeral he busted off the lid and riz up in his shroud and told the parson to let up on the performance, becuz he could not stand such a coffin as that. You see he had been in a trance once before, when he was young, and he took the chance on another, cal'ating that if he made the trip it was money in his pocket, and if he missed fire he couldn't lose a cent. And, by George, he sued Jacops for the rhino and got judgment; and he set up the coffin in his back parlor and said he 'lowed to take his time, now. It was always an aggravation to Jacops the way that miserable old thing acted. He moved back to Indiany pretty soon--went to Wellsville--Wellsville was the place the Hogadorns was from. Mighty fine family. Old Maryland stock. Old Squire Hogadorn could carry around more mixed licker, and cuss better than most any man I ever see. His second wife was the Widder Billings--she that was Becky Martin; her dam was Deacon Dunlap's first wife.

(In the original version Twain tells about Jacops and his coffin, but left this out in the revised version.)

Her oldest child, Maria, married a missionary and died in grace--et up by the savages. They et him, too, poor feller--biled him. It warn't the custom, so they say, but they explained to friends of his'n that went down there to

"Sally--that's Sally Hogadorn--Sally married a missionary, and they went off carrying the good news to the cannibals out in one of them way-off islands round the world in the

bring away his things, that they'd tried missionaries every other way and never could get any good out of 'em--and so it annoyed all his relations to find out that that man's life was fooled away just out of a dern'd experiment, so to speak. But mind you, there ain't anything ever reely lost; everything that people can't understand don't see the reason of does good if you only hold on and give it a fair shake; Prov'dence don't fire no blank ca'tridges, boys. That there missionary's substance, unbeknowns to himself, actu'ly converted every last one of them heatens that took a chance at the barbecue. Nothing ever fetched them but that. Don't tell me it was an accident that he was biled. There ain't no such a thing as an accident.

(In the original he doesn't expound on the missionary incident as he does in the revised version.)

When my Uncle Lem was leaning up agin a scaffolding once, sick, or drunk, or suthin, an Irishman with a hod full of bricks fell on him out of the

middle of the ocean somers, and they et her; et him too, which was irregular; it warn't the custom to eat the missionary, but only the family, and when they see what they had done they was dreadful sorry about it, and when the relations sent down there to fetch away the things they said so--said so right out--said they was sorry, and 'pologized, and said it shouldn't happen again; said 'twas an accident.

"Accident! now that's foolishness; there ain't no such thing as an accident; there ain't nothing happens in the world but what's ordered just so by a wiser Power than us, and it's always fur a good purpose; we don't know what the good purpose was, sometimes--and it was the same with the families that was short a missionary and his wife. But that ain't no matter, and it ain't any of our business; all that concerns us is that it was a special providence and it had a good intention. No, sir, there ain't no such thing as an accident. Whenever a thing happens that you think is an accident you make up your mind it ain't no accident at all--it's special providence.

(Twain also changed the name from Maria to Sally Hogadorn in the revised version.)

"You look at my Uncle Lem--what do you say to that? That's all I ask you--you just look at my Uncle Lem and talk to me about accidents! It was

third story and broke the old man's back in two places. People said it was an accident. Much accident there was about that. He didn't know what he was there for, but he was there for a good object. If he hadn't been there the Irishman would have been killed. Nobody can ever make me believe anything different from that. Uncle Lem's dog was there. Why didn't the Irishman fall on the dog? Becuz the dog would a seen him a coming and stood from under. That's the reason the dog warn't appinted. A dog can't be depended on to carry out a special providence. Mark my words, it was a put-up thing. Accidents don't happen, boys. Uncle Lem's dog--I wish you could a seen that dog. He was a regular shepherd-- or ruther he was part bull and part shepherd--splended animal; belonged to Parson Hagar before Uncle Lem got him.

(Twain never tells much about the dog, or his name, but in the revised version he comments on the breed name, and gives exceptional praise to the dog.)

like this: one day my Uncle Lem and his dog was downtown, and he was a-leanin' up against a scaffolding--sick, or drunk, or somethin'--and there was an Irishman with a hod of bricks up the ladder along about the third story, and his foot slipped and down he come, bricks and all, and hit a stranger fair and square and knocked the everlasting aspirations out of him; he was ready for the coroner in two minutes. Now then people said it was an accident.

"Accident! there warn't no accident about it; 'twas a special providence, and had a mysterious, noble intention back of it. The idea was to save that Irishman. If the stranger hadn't been there that Irishman would have been killed. The people said 'special providence--sho! the dog was there--why didn't the Irishman fall on the dog? Why warn't the dog app'inted?' Fer a mighty good reason--the dog would 'a' seen him a'coming; you can't depend on no dog to carry out a special providence. You couldn't hit a dog with an Irishman because--lemme see, what was that dog's name . . . (musing). . . oh, yes, Jasper --and a mighty good dog too; he wa'n't no common dog, he wa'n't no mongrel; he was a composite. A composite dog is a dog that's made up of all the valuable qualities that's in the dog breed--kind of a syndicate; and a mongrel is made up of the riffraff that's left over. That Jasper was one of the most wonderful dogs you ever see. Uncle Lem got him

of the Wheelers. I reckon you've heard of the Wheelers; ain't no better blood south of the line than the Wheelers.

Parson Hagar belonged to the Western Reserve Hagars; prime family; mother was a Watson; one of his sisters married a Wheeler; they settled in Morgan County, and he got nipped by the machinery in a carpet factory and went through in less than a quarter of a minute; his widder bought the piece of carpet that had his remains wove in, and people come a hundred miles to 'tend the funeral. There was fourteen yards in the piece. She wouldn't let them roll him up, but planted him just so--full length. The church was middling small where they preached the funeral, and they had to let one end of the coffin stick out of the window. They didn't bury him--they planted one end, and let him stand up, same as a monument. And they nailed a sign on it and put--put on--put on it--sacred to--the m-e-m-o-r-y--of fourteen y-a-r-d-s--of three-ply--car--pet--containing all that was--m-o-r-t-a-l--of--of --W-i-l-l-i-a-m--W-h-e--"

(The original is rather brief, and really doesn't give a clear picture of Wheeler or what happened to him.)

"Well, one day Wheeler was a-meditating and dreaming around in the carpet factory and the machinery made a snatch at him and first you know he was a-meandering all over that factory, from the garret to the cellar, and everywhere, at such another gait as--why, you couldn't even see him; you could only hear him whiz when he went by. Well, you know a person can't go through an experience like that and arrive back home the way he was when he went. No, Wheeler got wove up into thirty-nine yards of best three-ply carpeting. The widder was sorry, she was uncommon sorry, and loved him and done the best she could fur him in the circumstances, which was unusual. She took the whole piece--thirty-nine yards--and she wanted to give him proper and honorable burial, but she couldn't bear to roll him up; she took and spread him out full length, and said she wouldn't have it any other way. She wanted to buy a tunnel for him but there wasn't any tunnel for sale, so she boxed him in a beautiful box and stood it on the hill on a pedestal twenty-one foot high, and so it was monument and grave together, and economical--sixty-foot-high--you could see it from everywhere--and she painted on it 'To the loving memory of thirty-nine yards best three-ply carpeting

containing the mortal remainders of Millington G. Wheeler go thou and do likewise.'"

(The revised version enhances the tale by giving a vivid description of what happened to Wheeler and his wife's reaction.)

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